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'Coercive' contracts to join Super Clinic

by Jared Reed

A recently-opened GP Super Clinic in NSW has been criticised for forcing patients to sign "coercive" contracts over whether they will be bulk billed.

Patients at the Port Stephens Super Clinic, which opened recently with \$2.5 million of government funding, are asked to sign an agreement stating that "Bulk billing, if offered, is a privilege which may be withdrawn if I do not reasonably participate in the management of my health."

The document seen by 6minutes also stipulates that the clinic will not give test results over the phone, instead opting to bulk bill all appointments "dealing only with test results", such as pathology, histology and radiology.

Patients must also agree to give all health care providers at the clinic access to their medical records, including questions such as "What is your marital status?" and "What is your sexuality?", which can be left blank if the patient wishes.

Doctors Action founder Dr Adrian Sheen says the agreement amounted to a contract that was coercive and not in the best interests of patients.

"You don't know who the receptionist is in a small town, do you? You walk into a clinic, you have a sore throat, and they want to know whether you're bisexual," he tells 6minutes.

"Doctors shouldn't be judgmental and I think this is severely altering the doctor-patient relationship. A super clinic that has been subsidised with \$2.5 million could be seen as setting government standards," he added.

6minutes contacted the Port Stephens Super Clinic but the centre's operations director, Dr Warwick Yonge, was unavailable for comment.

3 June 2010

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